1970

The Critical Tenets of Dr. Samuel Johnson as Represented in The Life of Pope

M. Kathleen Parienti
Eastern Illinois University

PAPER CERTIFICATE #2

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates who have written formal theses.

SUBJECT: Permission to reproduce theses.

The University Library is receiving a number of requests from other institutions asking permission to reproduce dissertations for inclusion in their library holdings. Although no copyright laws are involved, we feel that professional courtesy demands that permission be obtained from the author before we allow theses to be copied.

Please sign one of the following statements.

Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University has my permission to lend my thesis to a reputable college or university for the purpose of copying it for inclusion in that institution's library or research holdings.

28 July 1970
Date

I respectfully request Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University not allow my thesis be reproduced because _____

_____

_____

_____ _____
Date Author

The Critical Tenets of Dr. Samuel Johnson as Represented in The Life of Pope

(TITLE)

BY

M. Kathleen Parienti

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1970
YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

27 July 1970
DATE

28 July 1970
DATE

DEPARTMENT HEAD

THE CRITICAL TENETS of DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON AS REPRESENTED in the LIFE OF POPE

Eighteenth-century literature elicits thoughts of eloquence and perfection in poetry; a time when excellence of expression was the resounding shibboleth. Dr. Samuel Johnson might be considered a personal embodiment of this lofty tradition; however, to limit his critical ability to merely appraising "poetic diction" would be to deny him far greater accomplishments.

Undeniably, Samuel Johnson has been berated as a "half-blind, half-deaf Tory"[1] whose critical blindspots were too deep seated to overcome; nevertheless, T. S. Eliot, a twentieth-century critic and poet, has listed Johnson as "one of the three greatest critics of poetry in English literature."[2] Yvor Winters remarked that "perhaps the only critic in English that deserves that epithet of a great critic is Samuel Johnson."[3]

---

[1]Donald J. Greene, ed., Samuel Johnson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 4.

[2]T. S. Eliot, On Poetry and Poets (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy, 1957), p. 184.

[3]Greene, Samuel Johnson, p. 5.

Imbued with a demand for "order, arrangement, and unity,"[4] the poets of the Augustan Age frequently settled for imitation rather than originality. Stock phrases, the authority of the Ancients, and the rightness of the rules ranked as standards for aspiring poets to pursue. Dr. Johnson refused to be circumscribed by such inflexible precepts. Dr. Johnson's criticism appraised the faults and beauties of poetry as he found them. These elements did or did not correspond with the poetic criteria of the Age. An example of this neglect of principle in favor of perception is represented in his Preface to Shakespeare. If Shakespeare had not followed the rules prescribed by Aristotle and Horace, it was a weakness of the rules and not a weakness in Shakespeare's craft.[5] To be sure, Johnson sought eloquence and plan in poetry but only as an integral part of poetry not as its goal. Dr. Johnson referred with disdain to "the cant of those who judge by principles rather than perception."[6]

This perception in Johnson's criticism makes his remarks still viable. T. S. Eliot appropriately asks: " ... whether Johnson, within his proper limits, is not a sensitive as well as a judicial critic; whether the virtues he commended in

---

[4]Walter Jackson Bate, The Achievement of Samuel Johnson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 204.

[5]Ibid., p. 181.

[6]Samuel Johnson, Lives of the Poets, Vol. 10 (Troy, New York: Pafraets Book Company, 1903), p. 332. All subsequent references to Johnson's work will be from this edition of The Life of Pope.

poetry do not always remain virtues, and whether the kinds of faults that he censured do not always remain faults to be avoided."[7]

While many scholarly articles and books have dealt with the entire body of Johnson's works and in particular The Lives of the Poets to glean his "critical standards," this paper will traffic only with The Life of Pope. It seems that in the work of Pope Dr. Johnson finds what he considers to be poetry: "If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to be found?" (p. 334) The purpose of this paper will be to ascertain what virtues Johnson considers to be contributive to Alexander Pope's art which distinguish it as poetry.

It is a typical demand of Johnson's criticism that poetry possess clarity of statement; neatly consistent, he exhibits this virtue in his own writings. In his summary statements regarding the genius of Pope, he explicitly concludes that Pope's poetry contains "invention," "imagination," "judgment," and "colours of language." These four words are essential to the definition of poetry according to Dr. Johnson.

About invention, Dr. Johnson writes: "He [Pope] had invention, by which new trains of events are formed, and new scenes of imagery displayed...." (p. 331) Dr. Johnson signals "The Rape of the Lock" as a poem imbued with "the boundless fertility of invention." (p. 203) The inventive Pope created

---

[7]Eliot, On Poetry and Poets, p. 189.

a new situation for these Sylphs and Gnomes--this "new race of beings." It is not pertinent whether these creatures were actually originated by Pope, only that he presents them in entirely new surroundings and adopts them for a novel purpose. He also fulfills the task (that invention must) of convincing the reader that the Sylphs and Gnomes are to be reckoned with and believed in.

To be sure, a poet must devise new material to work with--"new things made familiar"--but also must adroitly handle the new material in order to make it credible to the reader. One may ask how credible an aerial creature is; however, Pope swiftly and almost imperceptively convinces and directs the reader to mingle "with his new acquaintance."

Pope accomplishes this task with great aplomb. Unobtrusively, Pope introduces Belinda's guardian just as directly as he acknowledges the existence of Belinda, or the "lapdogs," or "the sleepless lovers." "Now lapdogs give themselves the rousing shake, / And sleepless lovers just at twelve awake: / ... Belinda still her downy pillow prest, / Her guardian Sylph prolong'd the balmy rest." (I, 15-16, 19-20) In addition, the Sylph is immediately given a speech in which he foresees "some dread event impending." (I, 109) He is also given a name--Ariel--which makes him more identifiable; and he has a purpose--to protect Belinda from the dread event. Without a doubt, the reader now readily assumes the sylph's legitimate

position in the poem. It is the omnipotent sylph who forecasts the direction of the poem; and once entrusted with that responsibility, his credibility is made manifest. Cleanth Brooks points out Pope's successful maneuvering of the Sylphs: "For it is Pope's treatment of the sylphs which allows him to develop, with the most delicate modulation, his whole attitude toward Belinda and the special world which she graces. It is precisely the poet's handling of the supernatural--the level at which he is willing to entertain it--the amused qualifications which he demands of it--that makes it possible for him to state his attitude with full complexity."[8] Just this one section of the poem taken separately is sufficient to demonstrate Johnson's meaning of the term "invention." Obviously, Pope's fertile and highly creative genius is abundantly in evidence in "The Rape of the Lock." Professor Wasserman's definition of neo-classic art summarizes Pope's accomplishment in this work. "Neo-classic art is not the art of creating, but of inventing, or finding--the art of pursuing with perfect and unstrained consistency a system of similitudes inherent in the given materials."[9] The crucial word is "similitude," and Pope does make his material credible and acceptable to the reader.

---

[8]Cleanth Brooks, "The Case of Miss Arabella Fermor: A Re-examination," in Essential Articles for the Study of Alexander Pope, ed. by Maynard Mack (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1964), p. 244.

[9]Earl R. Wasserman, The Subtler Language (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1959), p. 123.

The quality of invention includes another element: this is that invention must change commonplaces into something new. Johnson formulates this theory quit explicitly: "That familiar things are made new, every paragraph of 'The Rape of the Lock' will prove. The subject of the poem is an event below the common incidents of common life; nothing real is introduced that is not seen so often as to be no longer regarded; yet the whole detail of a female day is here brought before us invested with so much art of decoration, that though nothing is disguised, everything is striking, and we feel all the appetite of curiosity for that from which we have a thousand times turned fastidiously away." (p. 318)

To ordinary female preparations, Pope attributes qualities of a mystical ritual. In language shimmering with exotic sounds and vibrating with exalting activity, the poet's description has completely transformed this daily occurrence into a thing strikingly revitalized. "Th' inferior priestess, at her altar's side, / Trembling begins the sacred rites of Pride. / Unnumber'd treasures ope at once, and here / The various off'rings of the world appear...." (I, 127-130) We instantly recognize a whole new perspective. A rush of verbs which pulsate with action make the entire situation alive and captivating: "This casket India's glowing gems unlocks, / And all Arabia breathes

from yonder box...." (I, 133-134) "The Rape of the Lock" is simply astir with invention, and Dr. Johnson justly records the significance and necessity of this trait in poetry.

In "Essay on Criticism," Johnson expresses particular delight in another excellent example of Pope's inventive genius: "... but I cannot forbear to observe that the comparison of a student's progress in the sciences with the journey of a traveller in the Alps, is perhaps, the best that English poetry can show." (p. 313) Such novelty of thought and observation are the elements of invention which Samuel Johnson eagerly sought and greatly appreciated when found.

If, however, the poem is merely inventive and lacks the redeeming value of edification, Johnson heavy hands the work. As ludicrous as "The Rape of the Lock" is, in essence, Dr. Johnson discerns a moral: "to laugh at 'the little unguarded follies of the female sex.' " (p. 318) However, Dr. Johnson dislikes "The Temple of Fame" because it lacks any instructive value. In comparison to Dryden's poem on the same subject, Johnson slights Pope's composition because it does not contain "the pleasures and pains of real life." (p. 311) "But soon, too soon, the lover turns his eyes: / Again she falls, again she dies, she dies." (lines 93-94) The phrases are beautifully executed, but they hardly stir much response from the reader. We read, but do not participate. The reason is

that the poem does not accurately describe or reveal the "real life" emotions: it is pure lyricism. One of the most beautiful and memorable lines in the entire Johnson canon summarizes the weakness in this work: "Pope is read with calm acquiescence, Dryden with turbulent delight; Pope hangs upon the ear, and Dryden finds the passes of the mind." (p. 311) Jean Hagstrum says that this is the key to all literature. "To find the passes of the mind: that is the requisite of all literary art."[10]

Dr. Johnson finds "invention" to be a crucial element in poetry. A poet must be able to amplify, illustrate, and originate material, but most essentially, the reworked material must then be applicable to life. Samuel Johnson's critical principles center on that moralistic criterion that "the end of writing is to instruct by pleasing."

Another quality necessary to poetry is "imagination." Johnson explains imagination in the poet as that "which strongly impresses on the mind, and enables him to convey to the reader, the various forms of nature, incidents of life, and energies of passion...." (p. 332) This definition calls for a somewhat profound and new interpretation of experience. As such it closely corresponds with the definition of invention. Joseph

---

[10]Jean H. Hagstrum, Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1952), p. 176.

W. Krutch explains that Johnson interprets imagination as "the power of making new combinations of the things learned through the senses or by the operation of reason."[11]

An important aspect of imagination involves clarity in expression and idea. Throughout his critical writings, Dr. Johnson seeks clearly defined, well developed ideas. Poetry, he feels, must convey the plan, the idea without ambiguity. "As the end of method is perspicuity, that series is sufficiently regular that avoids obscurity; and where there is no obscurity, it will not be difficult to discover method." (p. 199)

"The Verses on the Unfortunate Lady" is berated on the grounds regarding that want of clarity. Johnson writes: "But the tale is not skillfully told; it is not easy to discover the character of either the lady or her guardian" (p. 310) A twentieth-century critic, Professor R. K. Root, still applies the same criticism as Johnson verbalized: "Its opening lines plunge at once into the moonlit gloom of a Gothick romance of terror:

> What beck'ning ghost, along the moonlit shade
> Invites my steps, and points to yonder glade?
> 'Tis she!--but why that bleeding bosom gor'd,
> Why dimly gleams the visionary sword?

Precisely why, the poem never tells us in so many words. The reader must pluck out the heart of the Unfortunate Lady's mystery as best he can."[12]

---

[11]Joseph Wood Krutch, Samuel Johnson (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1944), p. 474.

[12]Robert K. Root, The Poetical Career of Alexander Pope (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938), p. 88.

Quite similarly, Johnson finds this particular poem deficient in its awkward and unconvincing portrayal of emotions. Once again, Professor Root echoes Johnson: "I think that most modern readers will find it less 'tender' and 'pathetic' than did Warton; they may even find much of it theatrical rather than genuinely tragic--particularly the lines that denounce 'sudden vengeance' on the false guardian, and threaten his gates with 'frequent hearses.' Its literary virtues spring not from Pope's heart, but from his exquisite mastery of the art of poetic expression."[13]

Imagination, then, is only successful if it is rendered in a believable manner; it is here that experience and knowledge play an essential role. In this work, Pope does not succeed in portraying passion in a real manner; thus, Dr. Johnson succintly disposes of the poem as nothing more than "the amorous fury of a raving girl." (p. 201)

Thus, in addition to clarity in expression, experience and knowledge rank equally important in the definition of "imagination." There are innumerable statements in this work reiterating Johnson's emphasis on learning; scholarly as well as

---

[13] Ibid., p. 92.

empirical. In the Life of Samuel Butler, Johnson writes: "Imagination is useless without knowledge: nature gives in vain the power of combination, unless study and observation supply materials to be combined."[14]

When a poet attempts to express a theme, an emotion, or a situation with which he is little acquainted, the poem assuredly fails. "The Essay on Man" is such a failure, Johnson has a vituperative genius at his disposal which, here employed, quickly reduces Pope's attempt at pontifical writing to absurdity.

> Having exalted himself into a chair of wisdom, he tells us much that every man knows, and much that he does not know himself; that we see but little, and that the order of the universe is beyond our comprehension; an opinion not very uncommon: and that there is a chain of subordinate beings 'from infinite to nothing,' of which himself and his readers are equally ignorant. But he gives us one comfort, which without his help, he supposes unattainable, in the position, 'that though we are fools, yet God is wise.' (p. 327)

Line after line, Johnson brilliantly attacks the poem on the basis of the poet's "mouthed" sentiments rather than developed philosophy. Professor Tillotson quite agrees with Johnson's treatment of the work. "Pope was weakest as a philosopher. The 'Essay on Man' is beautifully planned on paper, but not as reason."[15]

---

[14]As quoted by Joseph W. Krutch in Samuel Johnson, p. 473.

[15]Geoffrey Tillotson, On the Poetry of Pope (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1950), p. 48.

On the other hand, Pope's "Essay on Criticism" is praised by Johnson for its authority and perceptive observation. "The same year [1709] was written the Essay on Criticism; a work which displays such extent of comprehension, such nicety of distinction, such acquaintance with mankind, and such knowledge both of ancient and modern learning, as are not often attained by the maturest age and longest experience." (p. 194) Since this work is a favorite of Johnson's, and one which exhibits neo-classic theory, it might prove worthwhile to look at a few passages which demonstrate Pope's learning and his knowledge of mankind. Horace's Ars Poetica is the classical example for this poem, which includes ideas from all the Ancients.[16]

Part I of this piece is dedicated to "the formation of taste and judgment in critics and poets." Two important lines in this section are: "In poets as true genius is but rare, / True taste as seldom is the critic's share." (lines 11-12) From these lines we infer that Pope considers that poets (genius) and critics (taste) "are born not made."[17] Pope continues to say that critics and poets alike derive their inspiration from heaven. Here is a definite allusion to Longinus who believed that inspiration came down like "fire from heaven."

---

[16]Samuel Hynes, English Literary Criticism: Restoration and Eighteenth Century (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), p. 150.

[17]Root, Alexander Pope, p. 24.

Lines 46-49 instruct the critic to know his own limitations. This idea echoes Horace, and reminds us of the longevity of the precept. Originally, the idea was given from the Oracle at Delphi which stated that all deception rises from self-deception. Horace wrote in Ars Poetica that the secret to all good writing is sound judgment which would indicate a recognition of limitations.[18]

In lines 68 and following, Pope asserts the neo-classic "edict" which was to follow nature:

> First follow Nature, and your judgment frame
> By her just standard, which is still the same:
> Unerring Nature, still divinely bright.
> One clear, unchang'd, and universal light.
> Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
> At once the source, and end, and test of Art.

Nature is for the neo-classicists the matrix which has to be inherent in the poetry or the criticism if it is to be valid. The neo-classicists defined nature as: "The universal and immutable in thought, feeling and taste: which has been known, what everyone can immediately understand and enjoy."[19] In the

---

[18]Allen H. Gilbert, Literary Criticism (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962), p. 138.

[19]As quoted by Ronald S. Crane in A Collection of English Poems: 1660-1800 (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1932), p. 1209.

words of Reuben Brower: "Nature like the Deity is a source of light, of the inner light of intelligence that sees things as in truth they are and therefore judges without distortion."[20]

In loyal spirit of the age's respect for the Ancients, Pope devotes several lines to the injunction that critic and poet must study the Ancients in order to form judgments and to deduce rules. "You then whose judgment the right course would steer, / Know well each Ancient's proper character...." (lines 118-120) Pope did not suggest slavish imitation of the Ancients; he states and restates that perfection of rules without invention and meaning is a futile mental exercise.[21]

The crucial message in Part II is that man's downfall is pride--*hubris*.

> Of all the Causes which conspire to blind
> Man's erring Judgment, and misguide the mind,
> What the weak Head with strongest Byass rules,
> Is Pride, the never-failing Vice of Fools. (II, 201-4)

Donald Clark in his analytical work of Pope writes: "Just as pride can be the most subtle of the sins that separate man from a true understanding of God, it can stand between the critic and nature, reason, or judgment."[22] Both Pope and Clark echo Sir Thomas More who said in his *Utopia* that pride remains as the source of all evil.

---

[20]Reuben Arthur Brower, *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 198.

[21]Hynes, *Literary Criticism*, p. 150.

[22]Donald B. Clark, *Alexander Pope* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 36.

Part III concludes on the note that a critic--the ideal critic--must seek truth in all his criticism and in the poet's art. This work is indeed a written formula of the neo-classic theory; the polished form and articulate observation mark it as a meaningful representation of the Augustan spirit. As such, it is also indicative of the type of poetry which pleased and instructed: Dr. Johnson's criteria precisely.

A third essential of verse is "judgment." "He [Pope] had judgment, which selects from life or nature what the present purpose requires, and by separating the essence of things from its concomitants, often makes the representation more powerful than the reality...." (p. 332)

Selection of subject matter is, of course, of primary consideration. Invention and imagination can only enhance subjects which can respond to poetic treatment. This would seem to suggest that there are subjects which, according to Johnson, are not suitable for poetry. He considers mythology, religion, and didactic works not judicious subjects. For instance, "Essay on Man" is labeled as "not very proper for poetry" because it is instruction which makes its subject matter of a lesser order. Professor Root clarifies this critical position: "Pope and the critics of his school were thoroughly aware that didactic poetry is by its nature of a lower order than the epic or the tragic or the greater ode, of an

order less removed than these from the cool regions of prose."[23] Pope works and reworks the poem but arrives at little if anything new; thus, there remains little in which to delight. "Ode for St. Cecilia's Day" has several mythological sections which weaken the poem because they do not adequately or clearly relate any identifiable human emotion. Dr. Johnson condemns it for this lack: "The next stanzas place and detain us in the dark and dismal regions of mythology, where neither hope nor fear, neither joy nor sorrow, can be found...." (p. 312)

On the other hand, the subject matter of "Eloisa to Abelard" is wholly praiseworthy. The human emotions, the peaceful resolve, the historical background recommend its success as poetry. The latter element--the historical background--is very important according to Donald Clark. "Perhaps the poem is more successful than its companion piece [Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady] because Pope is telling a public story, not a personal or feigned one."[24] Indeed, the subject is rich with pathos and truth: a poet's veritable paradise.

Fundamentally, Dr. Johnson directs the poet to choose material through which an idea can be related with clarity

---

[23]Root, Alexander Pope, p. 164.

[24]Clark, Pope, p. 67.

and invention resulting in something meaningful and applicable to real life. "The quest of Johnson's poet is a quest for impressions of and information about nature and life."[25]

The last prerequisite to poetry is "colours of language." As mentioned previously, Dr. Johnson is particularly responsive to colorful, elegant language. In this day, language and the process of its refinement does not concern us much. But to the eighteenth century, elegance in language was considered the ultimate achievement, and every writer sought to contribute to that process. As T. S. Eliot remarks: "Johnson, certainly, saw the body of English poetry from a point of view which took for granted a progress, a refinement of language and versification along definite lines; and which implied a confidence in the rightness and permanence of the style which had been achieved."[26] Needless to say, this progress of refinement could not tolerate crudeness or asperity of language; consequently, Johnson attacks The Dunciad for Pope's "unnatural delight in ideas physically impure, such as every other tongue utters with unwillingness, and of which every ear shrinks from mention." (p. 326) This emphasis on "ideas physically impure" in The Dunciad is still notorious today. "The most famous

---

[25]Hagstrum, Literary Criticism, p. 54.

[26]Eliot, On Poetry and Poets, p. 188.

(and most often deplored) kind of ugliness in the Dunciad is the obscenity, the way in which Pope dwells upon the excretory processes and debased sexuality."[27]

Frequently, critics of Johnson have objected to his emphasis on rhetorical beauty rather than concern for thought. In actuality, these complaints are hardly justified. The bulk of Johnson's criticism contains a resolute demand for sense as well as sound. Several of Pope's poems which are particularly elegant and mellifluous are nevertheless censured because sense is notably absent. "The Ode for St. Cecilia's Day" demonstrates good imagery and versification; however, these virtues are not sufficient to compensate for want of thought. Another example to the point is evident in this passage: "I have been told that the couplet by which he [Pope] declared his own ear to be most gratified, was this: 'Lo, where Maeotis sleeps, and hardly flows / The freezing Tanais through a waste of snows;' but the reason of this preference I cannot discover." (p. 334) F. R. Leavis remarks that: "Johnson... has no leaning towards the taste, so decidedly alive in the eighteenth century, for Spenserian-Tennysonian melodizing, the incantatory play of

---

[27]Thomas R. Edwards, Jr., This Dark Estate: A Reading of Pope (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), p. 114.

mellifluousness in which sense is subordinated."[28] Johnson finds no sense in the lines and therefore they are deficient as poetry. Leavis summarizes Johnson's theory on sound in verse: "There is always to be a substance of statement in verse, and it is fair to say that the music Johnson demands is a music of meaning as well as sound."[29]

Nevertheless, in the works of Pope, Samuel Johnson does find the epitome of rhetorical beauty as well as meaningful poetry. He responds to it with sensitivity and relish. "When he found rhetorical beauty, Johnson was free to enjoy it to the full... The pleasure it aroused was almost unadulterated, and he could read Alexander Pope with 'perpetual delight.'"[30]

Beautiful, smooth cadences have always been a boon to mankind; poetry with lovely lyrics lulls as gently and as pleasurably as a summer night's breeze. When a poet combines awesome melodies with reflections and responses, surely then he has attained "the passes of the mind."

Since "Eloisa to Abelard" is a poem which Dr. Johnson signals as "one of the most happy productions of human wit," the last portion of this paper will peruse and explicate this work in order to point out the "Johnsonian" qualifications which mark it as true poetry.

---

[28]F. R. Leavis, "Johnson as Critic," in Samuel Johnson, ed. by Donald J. Greene (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 75.

[29]Ibid., p. 74.

[30]Hagstrum, Literary Criticism, p. 136.

Judgment, as we have said, is crucial to a poem's success. In "Eloisa to Abelard," the subject matter is certainly propitious. The two characters involved were persons of eminence due to their reputation for erudition in the twelfth century; their star-crossed love affair augments their fame. In addition, the ultimate resolve of their conflicts (Eloisa's, in particular) rejects a feeling of total despair for a feeling of restrained, but nevertheless quiet submission. All in all, it lends itself beautifully to poetic treatment, and Pope relates his tale with much skill.

From the outset, Pope portrays a vivid contrast between Eloisa's inner state of joy, happiness, and yearning in connection with Abelard to the dark, melancholic, restraining aspects of the convent. "Deep solitude," "awful cells," "ever-musing melancholy"--these are the words which convey the anguish and suffering Eloisa feels. This excellent portrayal is indicative of the imaginative genius of Pope who interprets and articulates an experience whereby the emotions and meaning are at once recognizable.

The second stanza informs us of the real conflict: the conflict between Eloisa and Abelard (passion or nature) and Eloisa and God (grace).

> Dear fatal name! rest ever unreveal'd,
> Nor pass these lips in holy silence seal'd:
> Hide it, my heart, within that close disguise;
> Where mix'd with God's, his lov'd Idea lies:[31]

"The central conflict in her soul is between Abelard and God--which is to say between Hell and Heaven."[32] Here Pope in the first two stanzas provides us with the clear-cut direction of the work; there is no ambiguity. Johnson's demand for clarity beyond any shadow of obscurity has been fulfilled.

Eloisa's character as an intense, passionate woman who still loves Abelard more than the convent is delineated thoroughly. She is trembling, alive with love and passion; but her needs have been thwarted by this unnatural and unsettling celibacy.

> Now warm in love, now with'ring in thy bloom,
> Lost in a convent's solitary gloom!
> There stern Religion quench'd th' unwilling flame,
> There dy'd the best of passions, Love and Fame.
> (lines 37-40)

Thomas Edwards adds this note: "Her nature cannot adapt itself to the asceticism of the cloistered life, whose emblems are darkness, hardness, pallor, cold."[33]

Eloisa is in a state of turmoil: her love for Abelard only intensifies her dissatisfaction with the convent; and her vows and Abelard's physical condition make it impossible for her to

---

[31]Alexander Pope, "Eloisa to Abelard," ed. by James E. Wellington (Miami: University of Miami Press, 1965), lines 9-12. All subsequent references to this poem are from this edition.

[32]Ibid., p. 39.

[33]Edwards, This Dark Estate, p. 24.

realize her passionate desires. Thus, Pope augments the pathos of the situation by having Eloisa reminisce about the happier times she and Abelard enjoyed in the earlier days. It is a device that escapes the torturing reality of the present, but heightens the futility of her position.

Abelard is presented as a sort of celestial god whose infectious charms and "all-beauteous Mind" captivate Eloisa from the beginning. They fall in love and are ecstatically happy; life takes on a meaning, a direction. Through their relationship Eloisa arrives at an understanding of the meaning of the word love. She realizes that this blissful state is superior to all else in life; it alone gives impetus and motivation for living. They seek in love "for ought but love alone." (line 84)

Now Eloisa is bereft of this impetus; the spiritual life cannot compensate for the flesh-and-blood realities of pleasure and pain. Consequently, she dreams of Abelard continually. His face supersedes the face on the Cross; his lips and being are what she trembles for. The language is intense, painfully astir with forbidden desire. Pope has crystallized the essence of her pain. Indeed, T. S. Eliot's "objective correlative" is made manifest in this portrayal.

Eloisa gasps and struggles to regain composure, to restore the spiritual:

> Ah no! instruct me other joys to prize,
> With other beauties charm my partial eyes,
> Full in my view, set all the bright abode,
> And make my soul quit Abelard for God.
> (lines 125-128)

It is an earnest plea imbued with poignancy; nevertheless, she is not resolved. The somewhat erotic imagery of the next stanza implies as much in speaking of "The dying gales that pant upon the trees, / The lakes that quiver to the curling breeze...." (lines 159-160) These lines picture nature as alive, active; they are reminiscent of previous times when Eloisa and her lover were united. Now, "Black Melancholy" presides over Eloisa, and nature's beauties no longer exist for her; she engages in a death-like state.

The latter portion of the poem still retains the thwarted yearning. Pope does not simply resolve the conflict as though there never really was one. Eloisa turns to death as the only solution to subdue her fleshly desires. This implies that she could not conclude the struggle by her own motivation; thus, she embraces death. James Wellington explains this death-drift as a spiritual paralysis: "... it is evident that at the root of Eloisa's trouble is the bane of the medieval monasteries, the spiritual paralysis known as accidie... It can be described as a torpor of the soul, a spiritual sluggishness which disables

the will, makes both work and meaningful prayer all but impossible, and generates a desperate longing for death which all too often culminates in suicide." [34]

To the very end, Eloisa still wishes for that other life with Abelard. She has only acquiesced because of an overwhelming sense of futility--a kind of care-worn submission which, even while it is made, acknowledges a longing for something else. At least in death, Eloisa and Abelard will be reunited and there is some hope in that.

Alexander Pope is totally engaging in the poem; the passions and pains of real life have rarely been so accurately portrayed, nor so illuminatingly revealed. His splendid couplets, imagery, and word-choice notably enhance the material. In addition, the male-female relationship has been sanctified and exalted in such a way that a D. H. Lawrence would applaud. The qualities of invention, judgment, and splendour of language are everywhere abundant; and most important this work of art leads the reader back into life and experience. [35] About this poem, Professor Tillotson says: " ... what Pope most wants to see in a poem is lacking [in seventeenth-century poets]:

> However, it may be observed, that among all these, that Softness, Tenderness, and Violence of Passion, which the Ancients thought most proper for Love-Verses, is wanting....

---

[34] Pope, Eloisa to Abelard, pp. 36-37

[35] Hagstrum, Literary Criticism, p. 179.

Pope attempts in Eloisa to Abelard to supply the lack, and writes the best Heroic Epistle since Ovid." [36]

If for no other reason than the creation of this one poem, the eighteenth century cannot be passively neglected. Samuel Johnson could have done worse than to have chosen Alexander Pope as a poet's poet.

Dr. Samuel Johnson remains a legend: his gruff character, his booming rhetoric, and his perceptive view of literature compel our attention. Although some of his ideas are uniquely of the Augustan Age, his precepts for the achievement of lasting verse stand firm in an otherwise evanescent world.

> They support Pope, I see, in the Quarterly. Let them continue to do so: it is a Sin and a Shame, and a damnation to think that Pope!! should require it--but he does. Those miserable mountebanks of the day, the poets, disgrace themselves and deny God, in running down Pope, the most faultless of Poets, and almost of men.
>
> BYRON.

And the enigmatic, unpredictable wheel of criticism turns again.

---

[36] Tillotson, On the Poetry of Pope, p. 15.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrahms, M. H. "Dr. Johnson's Spectacles." New Light on Dr. Johnson. Edited by Frederick W. Hilles. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.

Bate, Walter Jackson. The Achievement of Samuel Johnson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961.

Brooks, Cleanth. "The Case of M ss Arabella Fermor: A re-examination." Essential Articles for the Study of Alexander Pope. Edited by Maynard Mack. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1964.

Brower, Reuben Arthur. Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959.

Clark, Donald B. Alexander Pope. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1967.

Crane, Ronald S., ed. A Collection of English Poems: 1660-1800. New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1932.

Edwards, Thomas R., Jr. This Dark Estate: A Reading of Pope. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963.

Eliot, T. S. On Poetry and Poets. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudah , 1957.

Gilbert, Allen H. Literary Criticism. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962.

Greene, Donald J., ed. Samuel Johnson. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965.

Hagstrum, Jean H. Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1952.

H nes, Samuel. English Literary Criticism: Restoration and Eighteenth Century. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963.

Johnson, Samuel. Lives of the Poets. Volume 10. Troy, New York: Pafraets Book Company, 1903.

Krutch, Joseph Wood. Samuel Johnson. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1944.

Leavis, F. R. "Johnson as Critic." Samuel Johnson. Edited by Donald J. Greene. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965.

Pope, Alexander. "Eloisa to Abelard." Edited by James E. Wellington. Miami: University of Miami Press, 1965.

Root, Robert K. The Poetical Career of Alexander Pope. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938.

Sherburn, George. The Early Career of Alexander Pope. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1934.

Sitwell, Edith. Alexander Pope. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1962.

Tillotson, Geoffrey. On the Poetry of Pope. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1950.

Wasserman, Earl R. The Subtler Language. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1959.